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A Sermon Preached Before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

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A

SERMON

Preached before the

Incorporated SOCIETY

FOR THE

Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts;

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

IN THE

Pariſh Church of ST. MARY-LE-BOW,

On FRIDAY *February* 16, 1781.

By the Right Reverend Father in God,

RICHARD Lord Biſhop of *Lichfield* and *Coventry*.

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MDCCLXXXI.

At the Anniverſary Meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Goſpel in Foreign Parts, *in the* Veſtry-Room *of St.* Mary-le-Bow, *on* Friday *the* 16*th Day of* February, 1781;

AGREED, that the Thanks of the SOCIETY be given to the Right Reverend the Lord Biſhop of *Lichfield* and *Coventry*, for the Sermon preached by his Lordſhip this day before the SOCIETY; and that his Lordſhip be deſired to deliver a copy of the ſame to the SOCIETY to be printed.

William Morice, Secretary.

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HEBREWS xiii. 8.

Jeſus Chriſt, the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever.

THESE words, if conſidered with an eye to the preceding verſes, may mean, 'That 'our Lord Jeſus Chriſt is al-'ways attentive to the wants 'and diſtreſſes of his faith-'ful followers, and always at hand to relieve 'them:' Or, if we connect them with the verſe immediately following, we may underſtand them as expreſſing this propoſition, 'That the doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt is always 'one and the ſame, independently of the way-'ward and changeable fancies of men.' In either way, I ſay, the words may be taken; and they do not neceſſarily imply more than the one or the other of theſe two ſenſes, which the context will oblige us to beſtow upon them.

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But the minds of the Apoſtles, full of the greateſt ideas, and ſwelling with the ſuggeſtions of the holy Spirit, which, in no ſcanty meaſure, was imparted to them, perpetually overflow, as it were, the ſubject of their diſcourſe, and expatiate into other and larger views, than ſeem neceſſary to the completion of the argument, immediately preſented to them.

This being the manner of the inſpired writers, it can be thought no forced or violent conſtruction of the text, to take it in the full extent of the expreſſion; which is ſo ſtriking and awful, as naturally to turn our thoughts towards the contemplation of the three following particulars:

Firſt, The ineffable glory of our Lord's *Perſon*;

Secondly, The immenſity of the ſcheme of *Redemption through his blood*;[a] And

Laſtly, The unchangeable nature of his *Religion*.

In theſe ſeveral ſenſes, it is truly and emphatically ſaid of Jeſus Chriſt, That *he is the the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever*.

[a] Eph. i. 7.

I. The

I. The tranſcendant dignity of our bleſſed Lord's PERSON is expreſſed in theſe words.

For what leſs do they imply than a perfect ſtate of being, a proper eternity of exiſtence? Agreeably to what we read elſewhere, That *he was in the beginning*[a]—*before all things*[b]—that *he is Alpha and Omega, the firſt and the laſt*[c]—that *his throne is for ever and ever*[d]—and *his goings forth from everlaſting*[e]: Nay, and ſuitably to the very turn of phraſe, which the Holy Ghoſt employs in characterizing the Supreme Majeſty of Heaven, *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, ſaith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty*[f].

When Jeſus Chriſt, therefore, is held out to us in the text, as being *the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever*, we may be allowed, or rather we are required, to elevate our thoughts to the utmoſt, and to conceive with inexpreſſible awe and veneration *of that glory which he had with the Father, before the world was*[g].

II. We are called upon by theſe words to reflect on the conſtant, uniform tenour of that

[a] John i. 1. [b] Col. i. 17. [c] Rev. i. 17. xxii. 13. [d] Heb. i. 8. [e] Micah v. 2. [f] Rev. i. 8. [g] John xvii. 5.

amazing

amazing ſcheme of REDEMPTION, which was planned before the ages, was unfolded by juſt degrees, and was finally completed in *Chriſt Jeſus*; in this ſenſe, likewiſe, ſo intereſting to us, *the* SAME *yeſterday, to day, and for ever.*

The works of the Lord, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *are great, and ſought out of all thoſe that have pleaſure therein* [a]. But which of his works is ſo ſtupendous, or carries the enraptured mind to ſo high an original, as that which reſpects the redemption by Chriſt Jeſus? Man was produced in time, and ſtationed on this earth at the diſtance of no more years, than our chronology eaſily reckons up. But who can go back to that moment, when the Godhead ſate in council on *the diſpenſation of Grace* by the Goſpel? *On the myſtery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jeſus Chriſt; to the intent that,* in the fullneſs of time, *unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wiſdom of God, according to the eternal purpoſe which he purpoſed in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord* [b]? Inſpired language itſelf labours, we ſee, in ſetting forth

[a] Pſ. iii. 2. [b] Eph. iii. 9, 10, 11.

the

the extent of this diſpenſation; in declaring to us *what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height* of this ſcheme of divine wiſdom, *through the love of Chriſt, which paſſeth knowledge*[a].

Known unto God, indeed, *are* ALL *his works from the beginning*[b]. But this great work of love ſeems to have been ever preſent to him; to have engaged and occupied, if we may preſume ſo to ſpeak, the conſtant, the unremitting, the unwearied attention of the divine mind; and to have entered into all the counſels of his providence, which he had formed for the diſplay of his glory, *through all ages, world without end*[c].

Such is the idea which the Scriptures oblige us to entertain of *the manifold wiſdom* of God in Chriſt Jeſus: *manifold,* as it preſents to us the various evolutions of an eternal and infinitely extended diſpenſation of Grace; but *one and the ſame,* with regard to the end in view, the redemption of a ruined world, and to the conduct and completion of them all by the means, and in the perſon of the Redeemer.

What parts of this ſcheme lie out of the verge of our world, and how much of it hath

[a] Eph. iii. 18, 19. [b] Acts xv. 18. [c] Eph. iii. 21.

reſpected,

reſpected, or may hereafter reſpect, other and higher natures by far, than the ſons of men, it would be fruitleſs to inquire, as theſe deep things of God have not been diſtinctly revealed to us. Yet one thing deſerves our notice, That *the Angels themſelves*[a] *deſire to look into this* ſcheme of ſalvation; and are ſurely ſome way concerned in it, ſince it was deſigned to comprehend, *and gather together in one, all things in Chriſt, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in* HIM.[b]

But conceive of the intereſt which celeſtial beings have in Jeſus Chriſt, as you will; there can be no doubt, that he has been invariably the end of all God's revelations to mankind. The hiſtory of Redemption is coæval with that of the Globe itſelf, has run through every ſtage of its exiſtence, and will outlaſt it's utmoſt duration. The precious hope of a Redeemer was the ſupport of fallen man; the theme of all the Patriarchs; the baſis of all the Covenants; the boaſt and exultation of all the Prophets; and the deſire of all nations.

Look round on the ſhifting ſcenes of glory, which have been exhibited in the theatre of

[a] 1 Pet. i. 12. [b] Eph. i. 10.

this

this world; and ſee the ſucceſs of mighty conquerors, the policy of ſtates, the deſtiny of empires, depend on the ſecret purpoſe of God in his ſon Jeſus: before whom all the atchievements and imaginations of men muſt bow down, and to whoſe honour all the myſterious workings of his providence are now, have hitherto been, and will for ever be, directed.

Such is the uniform, immutable, everlaſting tenour of that diſpenſation, we call Chriſtian; the power and wiſdom of God in *Jeſus Chriſt, the ſame yeſterday, to day, and for ever.* But

III. Laſtly, theſe words expreſs the unchangeable nature and perpetual obligation of Chriſtianity, conſidered as a *Law of Religion*, or *Rule of Life*, as well as a ſcheme of wiſdom and mercy unſpeakable for the redemption of mankind.

Salvation by the blood of Chriſt was the eternal purpoſe of God, the ultimate end of all his counſels. But, for the attainment of it, He choſe to reveal his will gradually by ſeveral intermediate and preparatory communications. Hence the divine Law, though ſtill directed to the ſame end, has been diver-

 ſified,

ſified, according as the Legiſlator ſaw fit, *at ſundry times and in divers manners, to ſpeak in times paſt unto the Fathers by the* PROPHETS.

But now, at length, *He hath ſpoken to us by his* SON; whoſe word is become the ſtanding law of mankind; obligatory on all, to whom it is made known, and unalterable by any authority, or by any change of circumſtances whatſoever. The terms of ſalvation are irrevocably fixed. They are propoſed to all, and required of all, without diſtinction of ſeaſons or perſons. The everlaſting Goſpel is addreſſed to *all that dwell on the earth; to every nation and kindred and tongue and people* [a]. The extent of it is univerſal; and the obligation, ſo indiſpenſable, that *if an Angel from heaven preach any other Goſpel than that we have received,* he is to be rejected by us; nay, an anathema reſts upon him [b]. Since *the ſound of the Goſpel is gone out into all the world* [c], we are to liſten to no other. Nor is it to be modified to our expectations or fancies. *We are complete in* HIM, *which is the head of all principality and power* [d]; even in JESUS CHRIST, with regard to the perpetuity and eternity of

[a] Rev. xiv. 6. [b] Gal. i. 6. [c] Rom. x. 18. [d] Col. xi. 10.

his

his Law, as well as in the other ſenſes before conſidered, *the* SAME *yeſterday, to day, and for ever.*

AFTER THIS explanation of the text, every one ſees with what force it applies to the occaſion of our preſent meeting. For ſurely ſuch a Religion, as that of Jeſus, ſo divine in it's origin, ſo extenſive in it's views, and ſo permanent in it's obligations, deſerves to be propagated through the world; and juſtifies, or rather demands, the utmoſt zeal of it's profeſſors to ſpread it abroad among all nations.

And ſuch is the end of this venerable Society; inſtituted for the double purpoſe of converting the Heathen, who ſit in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death, to the bleſſed hopes of the Goſpel; and of keeping up and promoting in profeſſed Chriſtians that *faith*, which they have already received, but, through indigence, ignorance, or a vicious life, have ſuffered to languiſh and die away, or have not, at leaſt, cultivated to any valuable purpoſe.

And can either of theſe objects be indifferent to us? Be it but the *latter* of the two, it muſt deeply affect a good and compaſſionate

mind. Where the want of inſtruction is extreme in thoſe who bear the name of Chriſtians, and the means of obtaining it clearly not within their power, there is no doubt that both benevolence and piety call upon us to adminiſter what relief we properly can to their preſſing neceſſities.

But the *former*, I ſuppoſe, is the main object of the Society: And if, on this occaſion, we may have leave to enlarge our ideas a little, and to contemplate that object in the extent to which it has been carried by the zeal not of our's only, but of other antient and modern miſſions, we ſhall find it above meaſure intereſting to all true believers in Jeſus.

For look on the various wild and uncivilized tribes of men, of whatever name or colour, which our ambition, or avarice, or curioſity has diſcovered, in the new or old world; and ſay, if the ſight of human nature in ſuch crying diſtreſs, in ſuch ſordid, diſgraceful, and more than brutal wretchedneſs, be not enough to make us fly with ardour to their relief and better accommodation.

To impart ſome ideas of order and civility to their rude minds, is an effort of true generoſity: But, if we can find means at the ſame time,

time, or in conſequence of ſuch civility, to infuſe a ſenſe of God and Religion, of the virtues and hopes which ſpring out of faith in Chriſt, and which open a ſcene of conſolation and glory to them, who but muſt regard this as an act of the moſt ſublime charity?

Indeed, the difficulties, the dangers, the diſtreſſes of all ſorts, which muſt be encountered by the Chriſtian Miſſionary, require a more than ordinary degree of that virtue, and will only be ſuſtained by *him*, whom a fervent love of Chriſt and the quickening graces of his Spirit have anointed, as it were, and conſecrated to this arduous ſervice. Then it is, that we have ſeen the faithful miniſter of the word go forth with the zeal of an Apoſtle, and the conſtancy of a Martyr. We have ſeen him forſake eaſe and affluence; a competency at leaſt, and the ordinary comforts of Society; and, with the Goſpel in his hand and his Saviour in his heart, make his way through burning deſerts and the howling wilderneſs: braving the rage of climates, and all the inconveniencies of long and perilous voyages; ſubmitting to the drudgery of learning barbarous languages, and to the diſguſt of complying with barbarous manners; watching the

dark

dark ſuſpicions, and expoſed to the capricious fury of impotent ſavages; courting their offenſive ſociety, adopting their loathſome cuſtoms, and aſſimilating his very nature, almoſt, to their's; in a word, *enduring all thinge, becoming all things*, in the patient hope of finding a way to their good opinion, and of ſucceeding, finally, in his unwearied endeavours to make the word of life and ſalvation not unacceptable to them.

I confeſs, when I reflect on all theſe things, I humble myſelf before ſuch heroic virtue; or, rather, I adore the grace of God in Chriſt Jeſus, which is able to produce ſuch examples of it in our degenerate world.

The power of Religion has, no doubt, appeared in other inſtances; in PENANCES, ſuppoſe, in PILGRIMAGES, in CRUSADES; and we know in what light they are now regarded by reaſonable and judicious men.

But let not things ſo diſſimilar be compared together, much leſs confounded. Uncommanded, uſeleſs, ſanguinary zeal provokes your contempt and abhorrence; and with reaſon: Only remember, for pity's ſake, under what circumſtances of ignorance and barbarity the provocation was given. But when the

duty

duty is clearly enjoined [a] by the Redeemer himſelf; when no weapon is employed by the enterprizing adventurer but that of the ſpirit; when the friendlieſt affections prompt his zeal; and the object in view is eternal life; when, I ſay, the authority is unqueſtionable, and the means blameleſs; the motive ſo pure, and the end ſo glorious—O! let not the hard heart of infidelity prophane ſuch a virtue, as this, with the diſgraceful name of *fanaticiſm*, or *ſuperſtition*.

Nay, Candour, methinks, ſhould be ready to make allowance for ſome real defects or miſcarriages, which will ever attend the beſt performances of mortal men. What though ſome error in judgment, ſome impropriety of conduct, ſome infirmity of temper, I had almoſt ſaid, ſome imbecillity of underſtanding, be diſcernible in the zealous Miſſionary? Something, nay much, may be overlooked, where ſo much is endured for Chriſt's ſake. It is enough that the word of the Croſs is preached *in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity* [b]. He, whoſe *ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs*, [c] will provide that even the frailties of his ſervants contri-

[a] Matth. xxviii. 19. [b] 2 Cor. i. 12. [c] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

bute,

bute, in the end, to the ſucceſs of ſo good a cauſe, and the diſplay of his own glory.

Thus much I could not help ſaying on the behalf, and in admiration, of a CHARITY, which intends ſo much benefit to the ſouls of men, which brings out ſo many ſhining virtues in it's miniſters, and reflects ſo much honour on the Chriſtian name. They that feel themſelves unworthy to be made the immediate inſtruments of carrying on this great work of converſion among ſavage tribes and infidel nations, ſhould bleſs God for the nobler gifts of zeal, and reſolution, and fortitude, which he has beſtowed on others; and ſhould promote it by ſuch means as are in their power, by their countenance, their liberality, their counſel; by a ſtrenuous endeavour, in this humbler way, to ſpread the honour of their Saviour, and the invaluable bleſſings of his Religion, to the ends of the world.

Thus ſhall we make ſome amends for thoſe multiplied miſchiefs, and, I doubt, injuries, which our inſatiable Commerce occaſions; and ſecond the gracious deſigns of an all-wiſe Providence, which brings good out of evil, and turns to his own righteous ends even thoſe VICES, which our boiſterous paſſions produce,

and

and which He ſees it not fit, in this our day of trial, to prevent or reſtrain.

Laſtly, Thus ſhall we act as becomes the profeſſors of that Religion, which is divine, univerſal, perfect; in one word, the gift and the likeneſs of HIM, who is THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO DAY, AND FOR EVER.

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